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ABSTRACT

In support of a legislative evaluation of the degree to which Colorado's institutions of higher education should be accessible to the state's citizens, this paper reviews the barriers to student access and outlines the position of the Colorado State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education regarding the role of the community colleges in overcoming access barriers. It is noted that the development of the comprehensive community college in Colorado occurred as a direct response to the barriers associated with student access; unrestricted access and provision of occupational, community service, and adult education programs in the community colleges were roles legislatively mandated by the Community College and Occupational Education Act of 1967. While the community colleges have been effective in reducing many financial and geographical barriers, in the opinion of the Board much remains to be done; past approaches have generally addressed only one barrier, and the interfaces between the various barriers and between the issue of student access and the process of lifelong learning remain unresolved. The Board affirms its belief that Colorado's two-year colleges corporately represent the vehicle through which access barriers can be overcome, providing the foundation for the progressive development of a total postsecondary system designed to meet needs for a wide range of educational opportunity. (MB)

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Preliminary materials issued by the Legislative Council noted that the Interim Legislative Committee on Higher Education would undertake an "evaluation of the degree to which Colorado's institutions of higher education should be accessible to the State's citizens." This paper has been prepared to assist the Committee in this regard, and, concurrently, to present the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education's position on this issue. Further, because of the significance of this issue, the State Board believes that its views concerning student access are important to the current development of a State Plan for Colorado Postsecondary Education and therefore merit consideration.

C.R.S. 1973, 23-1-101 states that "The purposes of this article are to make opportunities for post high school education as available as possible in Colorado..."[1] The delivery system for accomplishing this purpose was described in the Community College and Occupational Education Act of 1967. In that Act, C.R.S. 1973, 23-60-102 notes that:

> "The general assembly declares that this article is passed in conformity with the plan for the development of higher education in the state, which includes a system of state general colleges, the functions of which shall principally be those of undergraduate education; a system of universities and special-purpose institutions conducting extensive graduate and research programs, as well as providing courses in undergraduate education; and a system of two-year colleges conducting occupational, technical and community service programs, with no term limitations and general education, including college transfer programs, with unrestricted admissions. It is further the intent of this article to develop appropriate occupational education and adult education programs in these and other post-secondary educational institutions, to maintain and expand occupational education programs in the elementary and secondary schools of the State

permitting local school districts already having area vocational schools to continue to operate them, and to develop work-study and on-the-job training programs designed to acquaint youth with the world of work and to train or retrain youth and adults for employment. The general assembly intends that state agencies concerned with occupational education in the public schools and community colleges shall cooperate in the planning and coordinated development of occupational education programs, to the end that the state of Colorado has a complete and well-balanced occupational and adult education program available to the people of Colorado at all educational levles."[2]

Thus, the State has addressed the issue of student access and the manner in which it is to be provided to Colorado residents, and in so doing the State has indicated the importance it attaches to the provision of postsecondary educational services. The importance of studetn access is further illustrated by a National Commission on the Financing of Postsecondary Education observation "That studetns access is not satisfactorily achieved is particularly troubling, for without access it is questionable whether the postsecondary enterprise can meet its other objectives."[3]

BARRIERS TO STUDENT ACCESS

There are several barriers, based upon much research during the past quarter century, which arise in any attempt to provide meaningful student access to postsecondary education. Those identified include financial, academic, motivational, geographic, and time barriers. Additionally, some of these barriers are comprised of several components. The following discussion presents a brief overview of each of the major categories.

Financial: "There are three basic components which have worked in concert to produce a financial barrier to higher education for many students, each of which looms larger today than a decade ago. They include direct costs (i.e., tuition, fees, books, and commutation), subsistence costs (room, board, clothing, and other personal expenses), and indirect costs (foregone personal income and reduced contribution to family support)."[4]

Academic: Several academic obstacles exist which, when combined, pose a significant barrier to postsecondary education. These include "admissions requirements, entrance examinations, language tests, general education requirements. course prerequisites, and bureaucratic procedures."[5]

Motivational: Beezer and Hjelm noted in a review of several studies on this barrier that "lack of motivation is probably the greatest single deterrent to college attendance by capable youth."[6] Moreover, other studies have suggested that motivational barriers are particularly significant for low-income youth.[7] Some facets of the motivational barrier include the degree of parental encouragement, and the student and family's expectations and aspirations.

Geographic: Numerous studies have noted the importance of proximity for college attendance. In fact, several states have made policy decisions concerning the time or distance beyond which students are without reasonable geographic access to postsecondary education.[8] This barrier is of particular importance in Colorado because of its large rural areas containing widely distributed populatiosn. There is also another element related to geography which impacts students access and therefore deserves attention, namely, those psychological barriers which result from physical distance.

Time: The time barrier is derived from the relationship of student access to the student's freedom from other obligations. This is especially important for those who are employed but desirous of obtaining postsecondary educational services.

TRENDS AND EMERGING ISSUES

Since the close of World War II, and in particular during the past decade, "the United States has committed itself, both individually as states and collectively as a nation, to further the expansion of higher educational opportunity."[9] Colorado's commitment to this effort was noted in the first

section of this paper. The national and State effort has manifested itself in a variety of ways, specifically in the development of financial aid programs and the establishment of comprehensive community junior colleges.

However, much work remains to be done regarding the removal of access barriers, as past approaches have generally addressed only one specific barrier. Although financial and geographical factors have been reduced in this manner, they still exist for many citizens. Additionally, the interfaces between the various barriers and between the issue of student access and the process of lifelong learning, and the impacts associated therewith, remain largely unresolved.

The community junior college, however, is uniquely equipped to resolve these remaining access-related issues. The development of a system of comprehensive community junior colleges in Colorado represents a significant commitment and effort on the part of the State to provide equal educational opportunity for its citizens. The dramatic increase in the number of students served by these institutions and the fact that many of these students heretofore did not have access to higher education demonstrate that the commitment and effort have been waranted and successful.

Yet, in Colorado there also remains much to be done, as it is estimated that over 500,000 adults in the state do not have the equivalent of a high school diploma.[10] The State Board believes that the community junior college provides the best alternative educational opportunity for this vast pool of students and for many other citizens as well. Colorado's two-year colleges corporately represent the vehicle through which access barriers can be overcome because of their lower cost, geographical location, couseling commitment, and open door philosophy. Moreover, they provide a mechanism whereby citizens can learn to live in and cope with an increasingly complex and technological society and where otherwise unavailable services (i.e.,

job training, retraining, and upgrading) can be obtained. Finally, they do this by providing such services at a place and time which allow citizens to avail themselves of postsecondary education.

Thus, the development of the comprehensive community junior college has occurred in response to the barriers associated with student access. The State Board's belief in this regard was supported in 1975 by the Task Force on Access, a group comprised of Colorado citizens appointed by the Commission on Higher Education when it stated that:

> "Every person should have access to education beyond high school if he wants it and demonstrates he can benefit from it. This means that alternative educational opportunities should be available which are directly related to needs and abilities of those who can profit from such education. It does not mean, however, that everyone should be admitted to a baccalaureate degree program."[11]

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In summary this paper has presented a brief review of the barriers associated with student access to postsecondary education. The State Board believes that:

1. Student access is of the essence in postsecondary education;
2. Postsecondary education should be as available as possible;
3. The delivery systems as developed in Colorado, are appropriate for providing access to postsecondary educational services to the State's citizenry; and
4. The comprehensive community junior college is the foundation for the progressive development of a total postsecondary system designed to meet the needs of our people for a wide range of educational opportunity.

The State Board's beliefs in this regard are related to its conclusion that "The most important word to an advancing, evolving nation is education, and that if education is for real, it must be for every person..."[12] Further, the State Board's position has been supported by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education in its "Preliminary Role Statement for Colorado Public

Higher Education Institution." This document articulates and endorses the role of the omprehensive community junior college within Colorado post-secondary education as follows:

> "The Commission like the Task Force, believes that the two-year community and technical college sector, as one of its functions, must provide a foundation for the progressive development of a total postsecondary system that will make it possible for Colorado to achieve both quality in terms of excellence of programs in all of higher education and quantity in terms of the needs of our people for a wide range of educational opportunity."[13]

NOTES

1. Colorado Department of Higher Education, Laws (Denver, Colo.: Colorado Commission on Higher Education, 1976), p. 37.

2. Ibid., p. 146.

3. Task Force on Access, Summary of Preliminary Report (Denver, Colo.: Colorado Commission on Higher Education, 1975), P. 7, quoting from a report of the National Commission on the Financing of Postsecondary Education.

4. Richard I. Ferrin, Barriers to Universal Higher Education, (Palo Alto, Cal.: Access Research Office, College Entrance Examination Board, March 1970) pp. 7-8.

5. Ibid., p. 11.

6. Ibid., P. 17, quoting from R. Beezer and H. F. Hjelm, "Factors Related to College Attendance," Mongraph #8, Washington: USOE, 1963, p. 124.

7. Ibid., p. 18.

8. Ibid., p. 27.

9. Ibid., p. 53.

10. Colorado Commission on Higher Education, Colorado Higher Education--Goals... and Reassessment, Staff Paper (Denver, Colo.: The Commission, January 30, 1976), p. 15.

11. Task Force on Access, Preliminary Report, p. 8.

12. William Caudill, Charles Schorre, and Jeffrey Conroy, From Infancy to Infinity (Houston, Tex.: Caudill Rowlett Scott and Herman Miller, Inc., 1977), p. 7-28 passim.

13. Colorado Commission on Higher Education, Preliminary Role Statement for Colorado Public Higher Education Institutions, (Denver, Colo.: The Commis November 1976), p. 30.

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3. Colorado Commission on Higher Education. Preliminary Role Statement for Colorado Public Higher Education Institutions. Denver, Colo.: The Commission, November 1976.

4. Colorado Department of Higher Education. Laws. Denver, Colo.: Colorado Commission on Higher Education, January 1976.

5. Colorado State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education. Report on the Reaction to Task Force Reports of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education. Denver, Colo.: The Board, 1975.

6. Colorado State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education. Response to the Preliminary Role Statement for Colorado Public Higher Education Institutions. Denver, Colo.: The Board, February 1977.

7. Ferrin, Richard I. Barriers to Universal Higher Education. Palo Alto, Cal.: Access Research Office, College Entrance Examination Board, March 1970.

8. Task Force on Access. Summary of Preliminary Report. Denver, Colo.: Colorado Commission on Higher Education, 1975.

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